



# Indigenizing Special Education

# Agenda



## Welcome & Land Acknowledgement:

- Brief introductions, recognition of indigenous lands, and overview of SPS and WA state context

## Student Support Framework

- Assessment & Monitoring: Attendance, behavior, testing, curriculum and CBMs, dynamic assessments

## Cultural & Individual Considerations

- Identity & Inclusion: Exploring tribal affiliations, disability perspectives, and personal strengths while examining historical context and language impact.

## Family Partnership

- Engagement Strategies: Family meetings, interviews, and authentic participation in the IEP processes

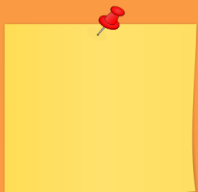
## Closing

- Voice & Reflection: Sharing initiatives and reflecting on implementation strategies.

# Learning Objectives

At the end of this session participants will be able to:

- Shift meeting practices to create authentic partnerships and redistribute power dynamics
- Understand the lasting historical and educational impacts on Native and Indigenous scholars
- Work towards authentic partnering with Native families and students



## Questions during the session?

Jot them down in our Parking Lot (around the room or in the chat)



## This session is being recorded with closed captioning

Let us know if there are accommodations you need to fully engage with us today

# Introductions

*We're so glad you're here!*

- **Aliina Crandell: School Psychologist Seattle Public Schools, CCEIS Special Projects**
- **Suzie Friedlander: MS CCC-SLP Federal Way School District**  
**[Tribal Affiliation: Colville / Coeur D'Alene / Salish & Kootenai / Canadian Cree / Duwamish]**
- **Alaska McGann: Standards-Based Instruction Facilitator Federal Way School District**
- **Lauren Nabahe: Eastside Native American Education Program Coordinator for Lake Washington School District, Bellevue School District, North Shore School District**  
**[Tribal Affiliation: Paiute-Shoshone / Navajo / Mono]**
- **Amanda Rambayon: Native American Education Program Coordinator**  
**[Tribal Affiliation: (Little Shell Tribe/ Turtle Mountain Chippewa)]**
- **Justin Young: School Psychologist Seattle Public Schools**

# **What brings you to this session?**

## **Share:**

- How are you showing up this space today?**
- How does this work speak to you, professionally or personally?**
- What is your perspective on disability?**

# Seattle Public Schools

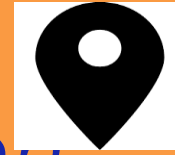
## *At a Glance*

- 1206 students in SPS have indicated that are American Indian on their enrollment
- Typically over 100 tribes represented, many outside of Seattle area
- Washington state has 29 Federally recognized tribes, which are: Chehalis, Colville, Cowlitz, Hoh, Jamestown S’Klallam, Kalispel, Lower Elwha Klallam, Lummi, Makah, Muckleshoot, Nisqually, Nooksack, Port Gamble S’Klallam, Puyallup, Quileute, Quinault, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Shoalwater Bay, Skokomish, Snoqualmie, Spokane, Squaxin Island, Stillaguamish, Suquamish, Swinomish, Tulalip, Upper Skagit, and Yakama. Additionally, the Duwamish, Wanapum, and Chinook tribes while not officially recognized by the U.S. federal government, have a rich and long-standing history in present-day Washington.
- Often under-reported, in our district, census, testing, and students listed and "Multiracial" under counted

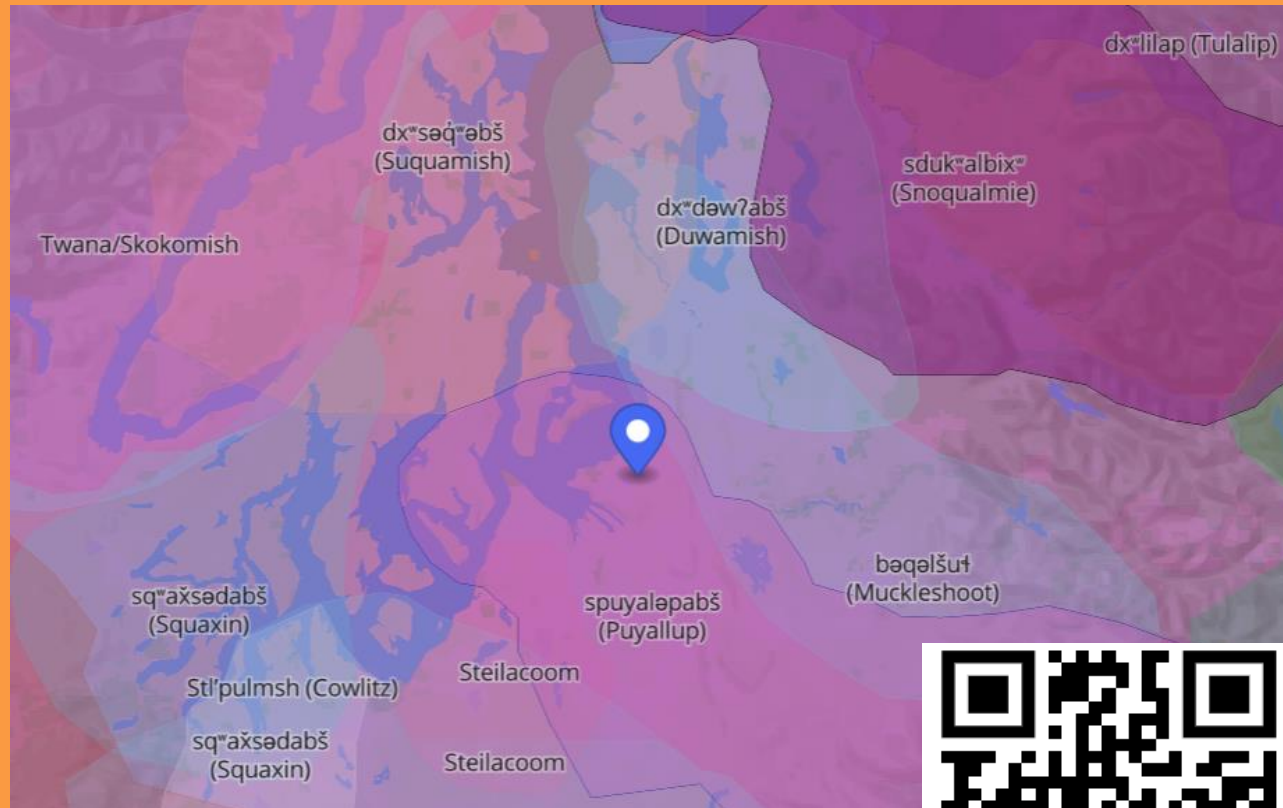


# Warm Opener

## Acknowledgement + Action



Native Land Digital



"Land is sacred, whether we consciously appreciate it or not. *It is the space upon which we play, live, eat, find love, and experience life.* It is ever-changing and ever-shifting, giving us an infinite number of gifts and lessons."

# Warm Opener

*Acknowledgement + Action*



**Muckleshoot**



**Sovereignty**



- Indian education dates back to a time when all children were identified as gifted and talented. Each child had a skill and ability that would contribute to the health and vitality of the community. Everyone in the community was expected and trained to be a teacher to identify and cultivate these skills and abilities. The elders were entrusted to oversee this sacred act of knowledge being shared. That is our vision for Indian education today.
- Community is inclusive of individuals with disabilities as well. Everyone has their place and skillset within community. Disability does not equal deficit.

# **Student and Family Voice**

# Seattle Public Schools

## *Student and Family Voice*

"The parent, the caregiver, the Auntie, the whomever, the support network, those are. Voices are are, are giant and they get overlooked in a lot of cases.

And you know, we we are fierce advocates for our kids.

And sometimes we get silenced."

# Federal Way Public Schools

## *Special Education Parent Advisory Committee*

"I feel anxious – will the meeting be combative? I want to mentally and emotionally prepare in advance so I can give my feedback, even if they don't ask for it."

"I know I'm part of the IEP team, but it doesn't feel that way.  
It feels like me against an army."

I'm always nervous. I feel confusion and worry when I'm asked so many questions on the spot about what I'm doing with my child at home"

# History Matters

**Residential  
Boarding Schools:  
Form of Genocide**

**Immense Historical  
trauma from  
Educational systems**



**First boarding school opened in 1860  
Last Boarding school closed in 1996  
WA had 14 Residential Boarding Schools  
That's 136 years of Genocide by  
educational systems**



# **15 Residential Boarding Schools in Washington State**

“This is something that’s been going on since 1492. The root cause is colonization,” Vancouver activist Duana Ricks-Johnson said. “Sacagawea — while celebrated — was only 12 when she was married. She is one of our first documented missing and murdered Indigenous women.”

*Indian Child Welfare Act*

*Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women*

*Since Time Immemorial Curriculum*

- **Understanding Our Past** Historical impacts on Native and Indigenous communities continue to influence educational experiences today.
- **Empowering Community Voice** Partnering with Native and Indigenous families as educational experts to create culturally responsive evaluation processes.
- **Moving Forward Together** Building authentic partnerships that honor cultural wisdom and center community leadership in educational decision-making.

# Historical Context and Harm (Lauren)

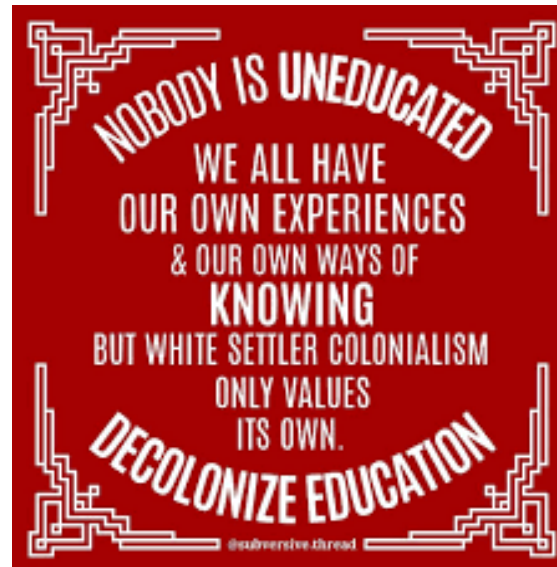
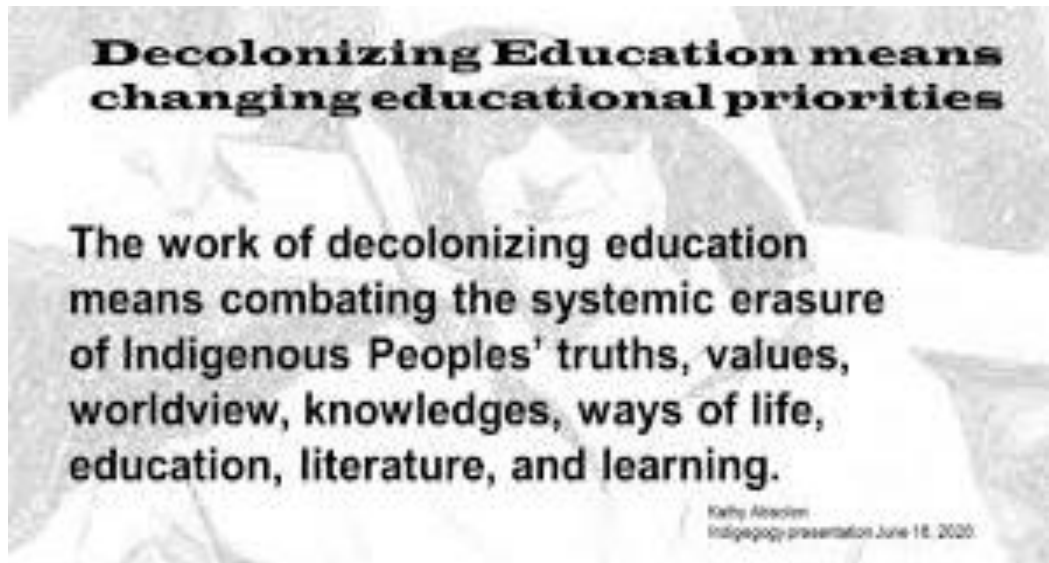
- Still here
- Personal story
- Not personal, don't be defensive, dismantle system part of
- Responsibility
- Everyone an expert, student and family
- (Alaska's slides 3% student)

# Power of Language

## Decolonize



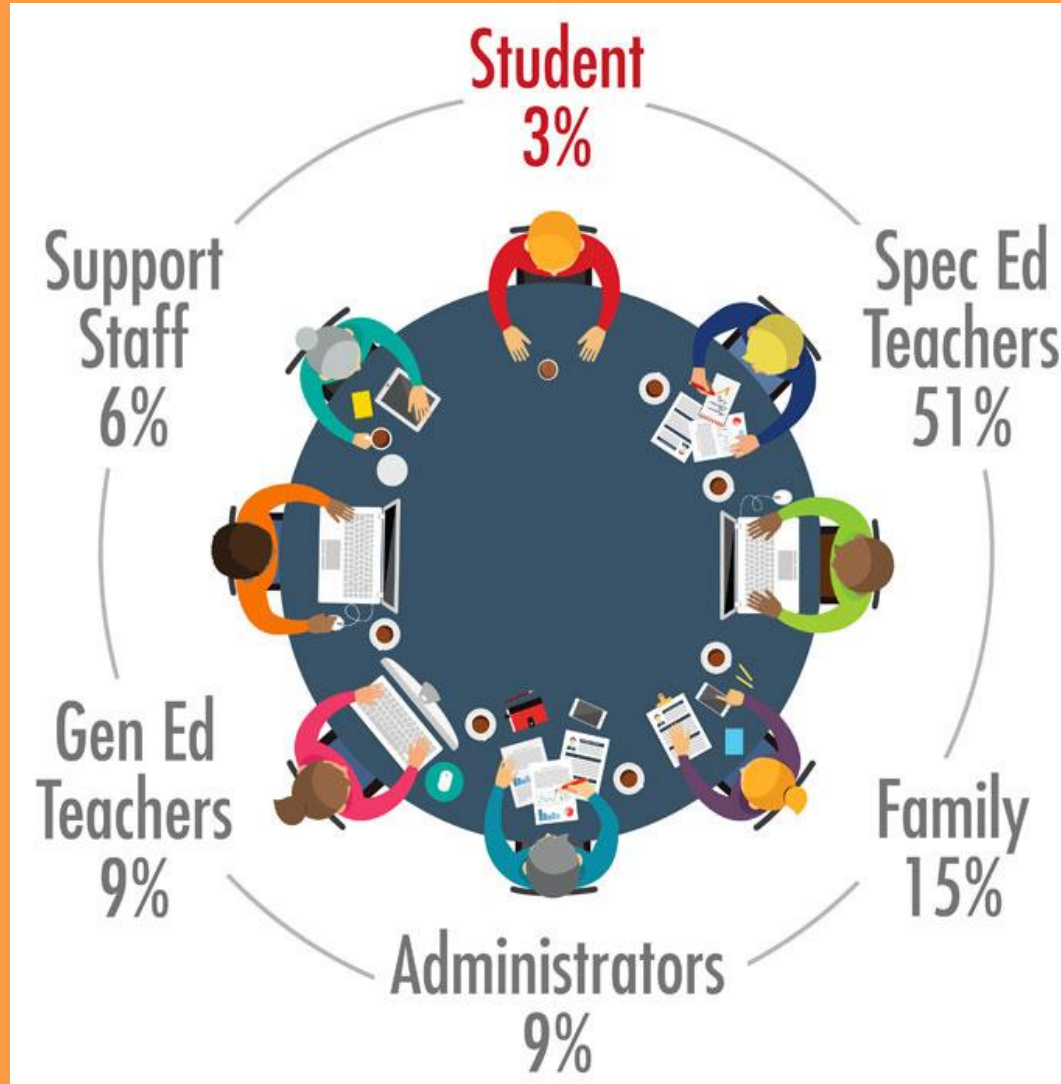
to free from the dominating influence of a colonizing power  
*especially* : to identify, challenge, and revise or replace assumptions, ideas, values, and practices that reflect a Eurocentric dominate influence



To decolonize means...



# Typical IEP Meeting *Research Says...*



**Figure 2. The Self-Directed IEP Leadership Steps**

1. *Introduce self*
2. *Introduce IEP team members*
3. *State purpose of meeting*
4. *Review past goals and progress*
5. *Ask for feedback*
6. *Ask questions if did not understand*
7. *Deal with differences in opinion*
8. *State needed support*
9. *Express interests*
10. *Express skills and limits*
11. *Express options and goals*
12. *Close meeting by thanking everyone*

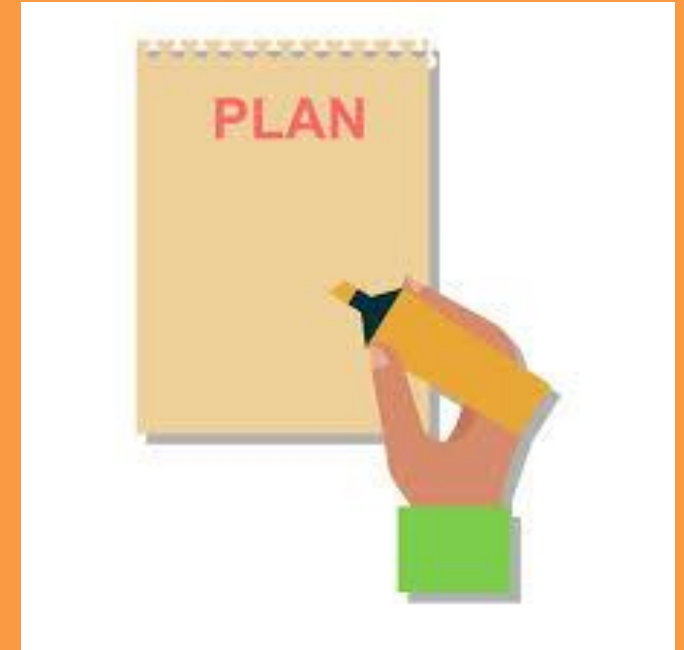
*Adapted from Van Dycke,  
Martin, & Lovett, 2006*



# The Foundation

## *Partnering with Families*

- ❑ Schedule meetings at times that accommodate family work schedules, cultural observances, and commitments
- ❑ Arrange translation services well in advance for the family's preferred language – partner with specialists
- ❑ Share accessible information about special education rights and processes, including who families can bring
- ❑ Send advanced copy of IEP to family for review
- ❑ Send home observation forms and surveys so families can voice student capabilities in home and community





## Research Shows

As with their peers, students with significant disabilities who lead their own IEP meetings develop stronger self-determination skills and acquire greater knowledge about post-secondary transition.

*(Seong, Wehmeyer, Palmer, & Little, 2015)*



Introducing herself or  
the other team members

Sharing assessment  
information

Identifying post-  
secondary goals

Explaining why the  
meeting is taking place

Talking about strengths,  
needs, and interests

Asking  
questions



Self-advocating

Adjourning the meeting

What does this look like for your scholars?  
What might you try in your next meeting?

# Independent Exploration

## *Collaborative Conversations*

As we think through how our IEP meetings look like, sound like, and feel like, consider using this OSPI resource for guiding collaborative conversations with families.



### **How might these questions:**

- Impact how families feel during IEP meetings?
- Impact our IEP writing?

## Environmental Cues: *What we don't say*

We started this training thinking about the importance of space and our experience in it. We read an article from the point of view of a family member who walked in late to an IEP meeting.

Evaluations & IEPs are legal documents... and our scholars and families are not on trial.  
Classrooms > Courtrooms



# Environmental Cues

- **Greetings:** Walk with the family to the meeting. Consider using first names or using tent cards
- **Equal seating** : Intentionally mix up where team members sit rather and disrupt the "us versus them" dynamic. Ensure chairs are of the same type and height. Sit down together.
- **Circular or U-shaped seating** : Ensure equal eye contact and participation among all attendees, avoiding the traditional "across the table" setup that can feel adversarial
- **Refreshments corner:** Set up a small refreshment station with water, coffee, or light snacks to create a more informal, welcoming atmosphere that helps reduce anxiety.
- **Sensory Needs:** Maintain comfortable temperature and lighting to feel inviting not institutional.
- **Resource materials:** Place documents and resources within easy reach of all participants.
- **Personal touches:** Display student work or photos in the meeting space to keep the focus on the child and create a positive, personal connection.
- **Collaborative tools:** Have extra pens, paper, and sticky notes available for all participants
- **Translation resources:** Position interpreter to facilitate natural conversation.



# Best Practices for Family Meetings

*Remember: Parents are experts on their children. Every interaction should build trust and partnership.*

## Before Meeting

- Ask about comfort preferences (smudging, prayer)
- Multiple outreach methods (not just email)
- Send agenda ahead, welcome additions
- Offer alternative locations if needed
- Connect with cultural liaisons as appropriate

## Setting Up

- Circular seating arrangement
- No backs to anyone
- Welcome family-chosen support persons
- Prepare visuals, avoid focusing on scores
- Assign roles if needed (notes, time)

## During Meeting

- Respect greeting preferences (gentle handshake, nod, varying eye contact levels)
- Make proper introductions
- Begin with student strengths
- Explain all acronyms
- Speak directly to families
- Honor silence as reflection time
- Maintain 5:1 positive ratio
- Regular comprehension checks

## Closing

- Review next steps
- Assign follow-up tasks
- Confirm communication preferences
- Document decisions
- Share team contacts

# Tribal Affiliation

While tribal affiliation is an important aspect of cultural identity that can connect families to valuable community resources, we honor and respect that each person's journey with their Native heritage is unique and personal.





# How to ask about Tribal Affiliation:

Can you tell me about your tribal affiliation?

It's not a big deal if you're not, but do you still go to functions?

Do you currently access any supports through your tribal affiliation or community?

Would you like to be connected to tribal or Native American community supports?

# Attendance

- Ties to tribe, rich learning experience, need to be there for community when loss, migrant program, fishing and picking berries, gathering roots, perspective on death/grief/birth, not too young to go to a funeral
- Eurocentric priorities on attendance, fulfilling what is right to us, most important to family, not taking them away
- No one's values more important
- Relationships matter, some schools give credits

# Attendance

- Understand that there may be attendance reasons due to being part of a sovereign nation. Work with students and families to plan ahead or catch up on what they are missing.
- What is your classroom/schools process for students and families when students need to miss school for cultural reasons? Every family and student are different and the reasons they miss school will be different too.
- Think about reasons for attendance: Housing insecurity, multigenerational homes taking care of elders or young, health, does the student need to work to support the family, funerals, complex traumas.
- Additionally, relationship may need to be worked at in consistent ways (especially through humor).
- Connect a student who is having difficulty attending back into community and with members who see them in a positive light. They can see that others are invested in them too.
- Is this school avoidance and a mental health concern?



## Behavior Observations:

These are ways teachers can connect with Native students. Have you seen any of these?

Preference for group work: culturally collectivistic

Preference for individual work: we cannot assume every Native person is the same

Eye contact may vary depending on tribe and expectations of community

Students may wait to ask questions until later and not interrupt

Student may not contribute verbally potentially leading to an assumption of lack of understanding

Time may be needed to build relationships; consider the impact of historical trauma

Respect for elders: Students may wait for adult to stop talking before following instructions

Student response reflective

Student response vocal

Were there multiple ways a student could respond?

Silence may be valued, space for reflection in conversation

Does not interrupt or like being interrupted

# Behavior Observations:

Fast processing speed may not be valued. Students may give space between thoughts to show respect.

Pause for reflection, be comfortable in quiet moments, how long were they given to respond?

Look for work samples and comparison to random student work

What is on the walls? Can the students see themselves and their culture represented in the classroom?

Is there a peer to compare to? Consider doing an interval observation comparing to randomized peers

Leave subjective words or phrases out. Focus on what you can see, not infer. (Ex: Student had head on desk did not complete work. Versus: Student had head on desk and was tired and withdrawn.

One behavior incident does not mean there is a pattern. Students have a long complicated current and past history of trauma they are facing.

Wearing clothing or regalia is an important connection to community. It is an important validation of identity and reflects that the individual does not have to assimilate. It also provides opportunities for models for younger generations. In an urban setting your tribe may not be close so it may even feel more isolating.

# National Association of School Psychologists Position Statement

*“Standardized measures are unlikely to be valid for many or most Indigenous students.”*

- Concerns: Tests not normed on the Indigenous population, students may lack of proficiency in English or in their native languages, and lack of exposure to the Westernized cultural concepts being assessed.
- This ends up providing a limited perspective of academic ability and language proficiency
- It lacks instructionally relevant information

## Consider:

### Curriculum-Based Measurements (CBMs)

- These can be adapted to include culturally relevant content and contexts to make them more meaningful and engaging.
- Can provide information about instructional level, independent level, and frustration level.
- Often provides more instructionally relevant information and individualized feedback.
- May be less anxiety-producing for students. For example, on Qualitative Reading Inventory – 7, you are having them read from texts that are closer to their instructional level.


# Dynamic Assessments

- Process includes three components: (1) Test, (2) intervene or teach (3) re-test
- Examiner participates and intervenes
- Focus on student needs, how to modify, and/or what interventions may work
- Flexible and adaptive process
- Determine area of need; pick a measure that is sensitive to short term changes, and captures emerging knowledge & performance

# Culturally Related Personal Strengths



- Pride in one's culture
- Religious faith
- Multilingual
- Artistic and musical abilities
- Multilingual skills
- Historical events around the world
- Wisdom from experience
- Sports
- Cultural related practical knowledge (e.g. farming).
- Culturally-specific coping skills
- Respectful attitude towards nature or the environment
- Commitment to help one's heritage group
- Has traveled to other countries
- Respectful attitude towards other cultures

Set the  
tone for  
the   
meeting

# Creating an Inclusive IEP

## *Examples and Non-Examples*

### **Non-Example: Focus on Student Limitations**



Jane is a 15-year-old with Down Syndrome. She has difficulties with comprehension, verbal expression, and anything dealing with numbers or math. She has a 2nd grade reading level and is inconsistent with responding to verbal directions.

*What impact does this shift have on stakeholders?  
General Education Teachers*



**Non-Example:  
Focus on Student Limitations**



Jane requires direct instruction in a quiet setting to have stories read aloud to her with few distractions. She only answers 25% of her reading comprehension when a story is read aloud to her. She is unable to write legibly. She is currently able to spell CVC and CCVC words with 25% accuracy using the Dolch list.

*What impact does this shift have on stakeholders?  
Families*

**Non-Example:  
Focus on Student Limitations**



Jane is often disruptive and defiant in class by blurting out responses, refusing to work, and fidgeting with items that are on her neighbor's desk. She will become stubborn and belligerent and cross her arms, raise her voice, or make threatening statements to adults and peers when attempts are made to redirect her. Verbal directions seem to aggravate her further, so visuals are often necessary, but not always effective. She has a BIP attached to this IEP.

*What impact does this shift have on stakeholders?*  
*Student*

# Guiding Questions

## *Individually Reflect*

As Special Educators, how can we:

- Tell complete and accurate stories
- Celebrate resilience of diverse communities
- Honor community sovereignty and strengths
- Learn from and with local tribal knowledge
- Involve students in writing continued stories



**Mount Tahoma**  
*Mother of Waters*

# Other initiatives this year

- Reading challenge
- Partnering with educator
- Outcomes for next year